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## THE GREEK MYSTERIES, A PREPARATION FOR CHRISTIANITY.

CHRISTIANITY, while marking a new epoch in the history of religion, did not appear suddenly and without due preparation; on the contrary, it grew slowly; and we are able to trace almost all of its essential elements to antecedent conditions. The whole is new, but its ingredients are old. The various component ideas existed previously in dim and scattered notions. Christianity focussed them into one great system. It rendered the most powerful pre-Christian aspirations and visions of religious yearnings concrete by embodying them in representative figures, especially in Christ, whose picture became the center round which all church institutions and doctrines crystallised.

The doctrines of Christianity are not accidental formations; they are the necessary product of a long development and the result of a mixture of various religious traditions. In an historical sense Christianity is truly and unequivocally the world-religion, for it assimilated almost all the cosmopolitan faiths current in the Roman empire. It discarded those elements only which had become absolutely unacceptable. It absorbed in a popular form the spirit of the most elevating philosophy of the times, and adopted a Puritan-like, at times even an iconoclastic, conception of God. While acknowledging the significance and potency of human sacrifices and other barbaric rites, it so transfigured their conception as to render them forever harmless by declaring their fulfilment in the sacrificial death of the Saviour on the cross.

Christianity is not the doctrine of one Church, nor the religion

of one age. Christianity is an historical movement, the roots of which lie buried in the dim past of prehistoric life. It finds expression in many churches and in various doctrines, and we must not expect consistency. The Jewish Christians, or Nazarees, held different views from the Gentile Christians with their Pauline theology, and the world-conception of Protestants is in many respects radically opposed to the faith of the Roman Church. Nor are these differences limited to doctrine; they find expression in ethics. The quintessence of the Nazaree religion consisted in the practice of communism, while all the great Churches of to-day agree in denouncing communistic doctrines as un-Christian. The early Church, represented by the Church Fathers, denounces image-worship as idolatrous; but the State Church of the Roman Empire condemns iconoclasm as impious and introduces the worship of the saints as an essential part of its institutions. All seems fluctuant and contradictory, but we shall easily comprehend the situation if we reflect that Christianity is not a specific doctrine but a religious movement developing various forms in various countries and passing through different phases.

Christianity does not exhibit one and the same principle throughout, but for that reason its underlying tendency is not indefinite. Christianity as a religion is the conviction cherished by those who call themselves Christians; it is subjective and a matter of individual consciousness. But Christianity in history is the historical movement that produced these dispositions in the hearts of various people; and this historical movement which is centered round the person of Jesus of Nazareth has for nearly two millenniums proved to be the most important factor in the development of mankind. Philosophical questions lie back of it, and moral considerations give it strength; for it is an attempt at solving the problem of all problems, which is the riddle of the universe,—the question of the significance of life.

The answer to the world-problem is formulated in story-form, in the tidings of the life and death of Jesus. Hereto were added doctrines, practices, moral injunctions, sacraments, rituals, church institutions, and philosophies. Dogmas and interpretations of tra-

ditions were made by various men living at different times, and their divergencies caused considerable trouble, but led finally to the establishment of Churches with definite doctrines and regulated institutions.

We have treated several phases of this problem, tracing back the origin of the Nazaree sect to the Kenites of the age of Moses,<sup>1</sup> setting forth the significance of the pre-Christian Gnosticism,<sup>2</sup> explaining the meaning of the sacrament and its relation to primitive usages such as god-eating and partaking of the food of the tree of life,<sup>3</sup> analysing the Lord's Prayer,<sup>4</sup> and outlining the personality of Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet of the Nazaree, according to the Gospel reports in the light of modern criticism.<sup>5</sup> We have further discussed the nature of the symbol of Christianity, the cross, in a series of articles, endeavoring to show how the various pagan notions of the cross prepared for and determined the rise of the Christian cross.<sup>6</sup> Christianity was prepared for by Greek philosophy, mainly by that of Plato, by the Greek ethics of Socrates and others, and by the Greek religion, including its mythology and especially the belief in the sons of Zeus and in saviours from evil.<sup>7</sup> We now propose to show the preparation that Christianity received from the Greek Mysteries, which played a very prominent part in the religious life of classic antiquity.

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We owe a great number of important religious terms and words of exquisite intensity to the Greek Mysteries, and some of them became prominent in Christian theology, while others have

<sup>1</sup> "Yahveh and Manitou," *The Monist*, Vol. IX., p. 382.

<sup>2</sup> "Gnosticism and its Relation to Christianity," *The Monist*, Vol. VIII., p. 502.

<sup>3</sup> "The Food of Life and the Sacrament," *The Monist*, Vol. X., p. 246.

<sup>4</sup> "The Lord's Prayer," *The Open Court*, Vol. XII., p. 491.

<sup>5</sup> "The Personality of Jesus and His Historical Relation to Christianity," *The Monist*, Vol. X., p. 573.

<sup>6</sup> See articles on the cross, *The Open Court*, Vol. XIII., pp. 149, 224, 296, 472, 673.

<sup>7</sup> "Greek Religion and Mythology," *The Open Court*, Vol. XIV., p. 513.

become household words even of these latter days. Such is the conservatism of language and the preservation of ideas!

The appearance in the mountains of the young god Dionysos, who was then sacrificed under the form of one of his sacred animals, as a fawn or as a bull, was called his *parusia* (παρουσία), i. e., the act of becoming present, and this same word is one of the most significant expressions of Christian terminology denoting the coming of the Saviour and the incarnation of the Logos.

In addition to the conception of God's *parusia* in corporeal form, we still speak of "ecstasy," of "enthusiasm," and of "manias,"—all words derived directly from the Orphic cult.

The word commonly used for "initiation" (τελετή, i. e., completion) does not occur in the New Testament, but St. Paul speaks frequently of the completion or realisation of the perfect man, using derivatives from the same root.

St. Paul says (Col. iii. 14): "Charity is the bond of our consecration (τελειότης)," i. e., the state of being initiated into the mysteries of the Christian religion. Christ is said to have taken the highest degree of initiation—τελειωθείς ἐγένετο (Hebr. v. 9) and it behooved him to be initiated (τελειῶσαι) through suffering (Hebr. ii. 10). Jesus is called (Hebr. xii. 2) the leader of initiation (τελειωτής), and to the Corinthians the Apostle proclaims that he teaches them as the initiated (τέλειοι) the wisdom of God in a mystery (1 Cor. ii. 6 ff.). The authorised version obliterates to a great extent the effect of the technical terms "initiated" and "mystery," but the sense is still there.

The word "mystery" is mentioned not only in the Epistles, but even in the Gospels (Matt. xiii. 11), and in Revelation (i. 20, xvii. 7). In the days when the New Testament was written, the term had no other meaning than that of the knowledge of a μύστης, i. e., of a person initiated into the rites of some deity, Demeter, Dionysos or Orpheus; the modern and more general sense of "secret" was developed after the Greek Mysteries fell into disuse, when the significance of the term was no longer understood. Among Gnostics and especially in the *Pistis Sophia*, one of the most interesting of Gnostic books, it is still used in the original sense, and here even

the idea itself is of greater prominence than in the New Testament canon.

The most celebrated Mystery-festival took place at Eleusis, which means the trysting or gathering place; and the same word is used in the New Testament to denote the advent of Christ, the coming of the just man, ἡ ἐλευσίς τοῦ δικαίου (Acts vii. 52).

The ethics of the Greek Mysteries are ascetic in tendency. Their devotees longed for untrammelled freedom and liberation from the bonds of necessity. They yearned for escape from this body of death, from the life of limitations, from the world of matter, and sought refuge in the realms of unbounded spiritual liberty. Pindar, one of the poets, who was strongly affected by Orphic traditions, sings (*Fragm.*, 131):

"The body is subject to death, the all-conqueror, but the soul remains alive. The soul sleeps so long as the body is active; but when the body sleeps, the soul frequently reveals the future to the sleeper."

Orphic life (βίος Ὀρφικός) was ascetic, and its aim was purity of heart, having in view the liberation of the soul from the influence of the senses. But the liberty of the rites, which was analogous to the liberties taken in the carnival celebrations of modern times, easily served as a pretext for going to the extremes of licentiousness, by no means implied in the original libertinism of the Mysteries. We know of a *senatus consultum* in Rome forbidding excesses of this kind. The original document is still preserved on metal tablets and mentioned by Livy.

The religious views underlying the several mystic rites are the expression of beliefs which can be traced back to prehistoric ages and exhibit an obvious kinship with the Osiris myth, the Adonis legend, and the story of Tammuz. They describe in the form of a myth the death and resurrection of the god of vegetation, and suggest at the same time the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which seems assured through the miraculous resurrection of the divine child of mother Earth,—Harpokrates, i. e., Hor the child, Tammuz, i. e., the son of life, Adonis, Persephone, Dionysos, etc. These ideas of the dying and resurrected god seem to have been superseded during the Homeric era, but kept smouldering under-

neath the ashes as folklore, and afterwards were strengthened by the importation of foreign elements. They asserted themselves again with the ascendancy of the people's parties, especially the Ionian democracy at Athens.

The gods of the Mysteries, Dionysos and Orpheus, ushered in a new conception of religion. Nevertheless, they did not antagonise the old gods, but entered into an alliance with them; and when the entire mythology of Hellas melted before the rays of the rising sun of Christianity, the ideas that had prompted the institution of the Mysteries survived the deluge and reappeared in new forms, proclaiming in a new language the glory of the dying and resurrected god and the immortality of the human soul.

The Dionysos cult proclaimed the holiness of intoxication as an event symbolical of the liberation of the soul from the body, and thus the drinking of wine became a sacrament of mystic significance. The god enters and takes possession of his worshippers, who are thus assimilated to their god and become *ἐνθεοί*—*gott-besessen*, god-obsessed.

The rapture of intoxication is not considered a licence nor an act of frivolous indulgence; it denotes a soaring above the misery of the present life into the higher realms of heavenly bliss, and affords, according to the doctrine of the Mysteries, a foretaste of the glorious beyond, of the immortal life to come, which awaits the soul after death. What appears to outsiders as libertinism is therefore the same with that state which St. Paul calls "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

The Rev. W. M. Ramsay says in his article on the subject in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (XVII., p. 123):

"The Mysteries occupied a place among the ancients analogous to that of the Holy Sacrament in the Christian church."

The Mysteries of Greece were not part of the official state religion. Says Mr. Ramsay (*loc. cit.*, p. 126):

"The public religion either became, like the Panathenaia, a purely political display of the power and splendor of Athens, or else, like much of the old ceremonial of the acropolis, was performed perfunctorily. It had no hold on the mind of the people; its simple antique ceremonies told nothing of the subjects which troubled

men's minds, the thoughts of sin, of a future life, and of punishment for guilt. But the Mysteries concerned themselves precisely with these subjects : they provided a series of preliminary purifications for their votaries ; they turned men's minds to the deeper problems of life and death, and gave them new views ; they made some attempt to reach and touch the individual mind. Thus, while the public Hellenic religion sank into disrepute, the Mysteries became more and more important as time elapsed."

Dealing with the main problems of the human heart, the Mysteries were more popular and not less venerable than the state religions of Greece. They were designed to be a comfort in the tribulations of life, and to make the initiated strong in the presence of death, holding out to them the promise of resuscitation and immortality.

The Orphic cult presumably made use of symbols similar to those of the Eleusinian Mysteries, but the latter adapted the crude ancient traditions to modern requirements and emphasised the moral influence to be exercised upon the initiated. The Orphic rites were lacking in this respect. Says Mr. Ramsay (*Enc. Brit.*, Vol. XVII., pp. 125, 126):

"Plato condemns in the strongest terms the Orphic Mysteries, which promise salvation in return for mere ritualistic acts of purification and initiation ; if he respects the Eleusinian Mysteries, which also promise salvation as the reward of initiation, this can be only because he believes that they promise it on different grounds. The reason is explained by Isocrates, who expressly says that this salvation in the future life, the reward of the initiated, is gained by all who lead a pious and just life. In like manner, Diodorus says that the initiated are said to grow better ; and Andocides makes a similar remark about the object of the Mysteries. According to Sopater, initiation establishes a kinship of the soul with the divine nature ; and Theon Smyrnæus says that the final stage of initiation is the state of bliss and divine favor which results from it.

"The words of Pindar, Sophocles, Isocrates, agree with the words of the Homeric *Hymn* (I. 480) that the initiated have peculiar advantages in the future world, and many other passages are equally clear and distinct.

"One of the most important passages is that where Galen maintains that the study of nature, if prosecuted with the concentrated attention given to the Mysteries, is even more fitted than they are to reveal the power and wisdom of God, inasmuch as these truths are more obscurely expressed in the Mysteries than in nature.

"The testimony of the Christian writers is entirely to the same effect ; while



stigmatising the impure character of some of the rites, they always admit that the Mysteries were intended to lead the people up to a knowledge of religious truth.

"The first and most important condition required of those who would enter the temple at Lindus is that they be pure in heart, and not conscious of any crime; conditions of ceremonial purity are enumerated as secondary matters.

"Now, with regard to the profanation of the Mysteries by those persons who ridiculed them, it is easy to understand that the very simple character of the rites, the commonplace nature of the sacred things which were exposed as the crowning ceremony of the Mysteries to the adoration of the people, lent themselves readily to ridicule when contrasted with the solemn preparations that led up to the crowning act, and the great effects that were expected from the initiation. The people who had been initiated, who believed in the salutary effect of the admission to handle and kiss the sacred objects, were naturally both shocked and indignant at the ridicule thus cast on their holy sacrament by the pitiless analysis of a cold disbelieving intellect. They felt that more than met the eye existed in these sacred things.

"Those who believed in the Mysteries kept in their hearts, as a saving and sacred possession, the knowledge of what they had seen and heard and kissed and handled; the thought was too holy to be rashly spoken of, even to the initiated. Numerous references prove that this mystic silence was generally very carefully observed."

The leading theme or *Leitmotiv* of the Mysteries of ancient Greece, the Eleusinian festivals, the orgies or Bacchanalia, the Orphic rites, and all others,<sup>1</sup> is the hope of immortality and the expectation of redemption from death.

In the Eleusinian Mysteries the myth of Persephone (the goddess of vegetation) was dramatically represented. Persephone, sometimes simply called Kora, i. e., the maiden, is the daughter of Demeter, the goddess of the earth. While playing in a meadow, she is abducted by Hades, the god of the Nether World. Demeter searches for her daughter with torches in her hand, and is at last informed of her fate by Helios, the all-seeing sun. The afflicted mother is in despair. She sits beside a well<sup>2</sup> and attracts the attention of Keleos, King of Eleusis, and Metaneira, his Queen, kind-hearted people, who received her into their house as a nurse of their child Demophon. She proposed to bestow the boon of im-

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<sup>1</sup> We shall limit ourselves to three Mysteries, the Eleusinian, the Orphic, and the Bacchic, omitting those of the Corybants, of Aphrodite, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The stone on which she sat is called the Laughless Rock, *Agelastos Petra*.

mortality on the boy by plunging him every night into a bath of fire, and would have completed her task had not the frightened mother surprised her. Demeter thereupon made herself known as



Demeter

Persephone

Persephone

Hades

Aphrodite

Enkelados

Gæa

Hermes

Athena

THE RAPE OF PERSEPHONE.<sup>1</sup>(Braun, *Antike Marmorwerke*, II., 4.)

Hermes

Eros

Persephone

Hades

Athena

Aphrodite

Artemis

Demeter

## RAPE OF PERSEPHONE.

Sarcophagus. (After *Ann. dell' Inst.*, 1873, pl. F. E., i. Roscher, *Lexicon der gr. und röm. Mythologie*, II., p. 1375.)

a goddess and took her departure, but introduced the Eleusinian Mysteries and charged her nursing—in Attica called Triptolemos—

<sup>1</sup> Persephone is represented twice, unless we interpret the figure with the crown as a Hera, or an Artemis.

to teach mankind the blessings of agriculture.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime Zeus interceded for Demeter and requested his brother to release Persephone. Hades obeyed but gave her a pomegranate to eat (here representing the food of death or the apple of Eve), which made her forever a denizen of the world below, and thus a compromise was effected.

Now Persephone, the Queen of Hades, divides her time between the world of the living and the world of the dead. In winter vegetation lies dead, buried in the ground, but in spring the god-



TRIPTOLEμος, THE PROTECTOR OF THE PLOW IN ATTICA, IS PRESENTED BY DEMETER WITH HER CAR DRAWN BY WINGED DRAGONS.

(Taylor, *Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, p. 128.)

dess is resurrected and fills mankind with new life and joy. This myth of the resurrection of Nature's life was interpreted as a symbol of man's immortality.

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<sup>1</sup> Other versions call the kind-hearted couple Dysaules and Baubo. The king of Eleusis is sometimes called "Eleusis." In the story of the mixed drink, which will be mentioned further on, Baubo is replaced by Iambe in the Homeric hymn. Demophon and Triptolemos are sometimes distinguished, sometimes identified. After the introduction of Bacchic rites, the young Dionysos plays an important part under the name Iacchos and to some extent seems to take the place of Demophon-Triptolemos. The Homeric hymn refers to the death and resurrection of the "holy child Iacchos" (262-264).

The Eleusinian Mysteries consisted of two festivals. Louis Dyer defines their significance thus :<sup>1</sup>

"The Lesser Mysteries at Athens were a sort of preface to the greater ones of Eleusis, and the time of their celebration was earlier in the year. The Greater or



DEMETER, TRIPTOLEMOS, AND KORA.

Relief from Eleusis. (Cf. Roscher, *Lexicon der gr. und röm. Mythologie*, p. 1350.,

Epoptical Mysteries did not come until the month Boedromion (August-September) six months later than the flower-month (Anthesterion) of the Lesser Mysteries.

"The ordinary progress of initiation was as follows:— In the flower-month at

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<sup>1</sup>*Studies of the Gods in Greece at Certain Sanctuaries Recently Excavated*, pp. 208 ff. London: Macmillan & Co. 1891.

Athens an applicant could become a *mystes*—a novice, let us say—by participation in the Lesser Mysteries at the Athenian Eleusinion. Thus, and apparently only thus, was a man qualified to take part, six months later, in the Greater Mysteries at Eleusis. But even then he appeared at Eleusis only as a *mystes* or novice, and could not join in all the acts of worship or see all the ceremonial. After a year had elapsed, however, our *mystes* became an *epoptes*, and as such saw with his own eyes and heard with his own ears all that the Greater or Epoptical Mysteries afforded. The religious privileges of the completely initiated are reached by two qualifying stages, as we should say, by baptism at the Lesser, and confirmation at the



Worshippers

Kora

Demeter

#### SACRIFICE OF A PIG TO DEMETER.

Initiation scene from the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Found in Eleusis, now in Paris. (After Panofka, *Cabinet Pourtales*, pl. 18.)

Greater Mysteries. The vague and unprecise terms in which the full ceremony is described are terms of sight. The *Epoptes* or Viewer is said to have Autopsy, or sight with his own eyes—Real Vision. These hints, with others, such as the connection between showing light and the title of the leader of the mystic ceremonial, who was called Hierophant, persuade some that after a period of darkness the initiated saw a great light.

"All the *mystae* and every creature and thing that was to play a part in the great ceremonial underwent purgation by washing in the sea. Sea-surges dash all human

harms away, says Euripides somewhere, expressing a belief well-nigh universal in ancient Greece.

“The first two days of the Eleusinian-Athenian festival were spent in Athens



Kora



Demeter



Human sacrifice (abolished?).

#### ELEUSINIAN CEREMONIES.

From Etruscan vases. (After Taylor, *Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, p. 22.)

after these ceremonies of purgation. Solemn preparations were there and then completed for the great ceremonial procession from Athens to Eleusis along the Sacred Way and through the sacred gates into the precinct and its Great Hall of Initiation.

By means of all this pomp Dionysos-Iacchos was associated with Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis, and Dionysos became one of the gods at Eleusis, under the name of Iacchos, which was chanted by the mystae all through the day while they brought him to Eleusis, and again during the day spent in bringing him back to his home in



Heracles Mystagogue Triptolemos Dionysos  
Aphrodite Eros Demeter Plutos Persephone Calligeneia

THE INITIATION OF HERACLES INTO THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES AT AGRÆ.  
On a pelike from Kertsch. (After Stephani, *Compte-rendu*. 1859, pl. II.)

the Athenian Iaccheion. Underlying all the light-heartedness shown by those who joined this procession was an incommunicable solemnity.

"No wonder then, if the yearly procession of the living mystae was often thought



Persephone Hades Heracles Hermes Cerberos

HERACLES IN THE UNDER WORLD.

Picture in black figures on an ancient cup. (After *Arch. Zeitg.*,  
1859, plate 125. Roscher, *Lex.*, II., 1122.)

of as a foretaste of the life beyond, a dim vision of happiness to be hereafter in the islands of the blest, a rehearsal or promise in this world of the performance in the world to come.'

The Greater Mysteries lasted nine days. The first day was called *ἀγυρμός*, i. e., the day of gathering. The second day, which was the day of baptism, was known by the words *ἄλλαδε μύσται*, i. e., Seawards ye who seek initiation! Then follows the day of fasting. The fourth day (*κάλαθον κάθοδος*) celebrates the rape of Persephone, which is typified by the abstraction of pomegranates and poppy-seeds in a basket (*κάλαθος*). Women with mystic cistes (*κίσται μυστικαί*) in their hands followed the waggon that carried the basket. The fifth day is the day of lamps, Demeter searching for her lost daughter. On the sixth day Iacchos made his appearance and the procession to Eleusis took place. It bears the name-day of Iacchos. The night which followed was the most sacred time of the whole festival. It was the scene of beholding. The mystæ or novices were admitted into the presence of the initiated or epoptæ. The seventh day was a day of rejoicing and merry-making; the eighth day was called Epidauria and was celebrated in commemoration of Asklepios of Epidauros, who, having arrived too late to take part in the celebration, had the benefit of a special initiation. In like manner Heracles was honored and made a participant of Eleusinian consecration. Not being in time for the chief feast, the Lesser Mysteries were instituted for his special benefit in consideration of his superior merits. The last day, the ninth, called the day of libations from earthen vessels (*πλημοχόαι*), concluded the ceremony. Pindar says :

“Blessed is he who has beheld the mysteries, descending into the Nether World. He knows the aim, he knows the origin of life.”

The performance at Eleusis consisted of pantomimes, the singing of hymns,<sup>1</sup> and the exhibition of sacred symbols. Dirges are mentioned by Proclus,<sup>2</sup> commemorating the death of Demeter's daughter, and hymns of joy greet her on her return to life.<sup>3</sup> A beautiful voice was highly appreciated and regarded as an important requisite for the herald.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For instance in a funeral inscription, *Anthol. Pal.* App. 246.

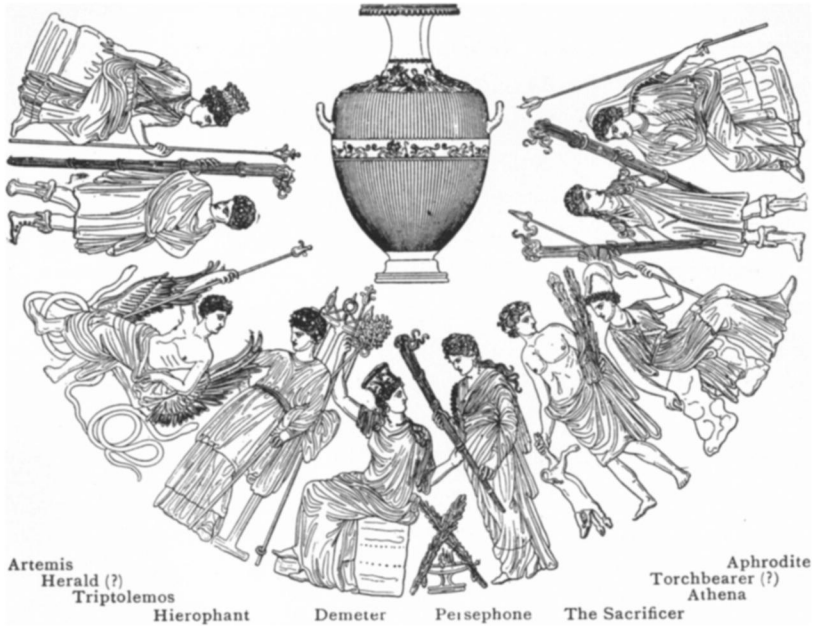
<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Polit.*, p. 384.

<sup>3</sup> *Schol. Theocr.*, II., 36.

<sup>4</sup> Philo, *Str. vit. Soph.*, II., 20.



There were four principal priests: (1) The hierophant (*ἱεροφάντης*), who was always taken from the family of the Eumolpides, a mystagogue, and, as it were, the god-father of the initiated; (2) The torch bearer, or daduchos (*δαδούχος*), commonly elected from a family who boast of descent from Triptolemos; (3) The



#### ELEUSINIAN DIVINITIES AND PRIESTS.

Water-vessel of Cumæ, now in the Eremitage of St. Petersburg.  
(After *Compte-Rendu*, 1862, pl. III.)



#### ELEUSINIAN PRIEST AND ASSISTANTS.

(From Taylor's *Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, p. 247.)

holy herald (*ἱεροκῆρυξ*), who represented the god Hermes, and whose office was to command silence in the congregation; and finally (4) The priest of the altar (*ἱερεὺς ὁ ἐπὶ βωμῷ*), whose office consisted in offering the sacrifice.

The initiated take an active part in the whole performance. They abstain from food in the same way as did Demeter. They search for the dead with the goddess; they mourn with her in her bereavement. They see the same salvation-promising symbols; drink the same immortality-spending drink; handle and kiss the sacred objects; and their beholding is thus an actual partaking of



Hermes.

Eurydice.

Orpheus.

## ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE.

Marble relief in Naples. The same subject treated in the same style is preserved in the Villa Albani and in the Louvre. Cf. *Zoega, Bassiril.*, I., 42.

the fate of the goddess, in which way they gain the same ends and become assured of a blissful life after death for their own souls.

The procession of the Eleusinian Mysteries was brought on

the stage by Aristophanes in his comedy *The Frogs* where we find many interesting details.

The Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* which is still extant is full of allusions to the Eleusinian ritual and gives us a fair idea of the



ORPHEUS PLAYING THE LYRE.<sup>1</sup>

(*Mon. Inst.*, VIII., 43, 1. Cf. Dilthey, *Annal Inst.*, 1867, p. 172 ff.)



ORPHEUS SLAIN BY THE WOMEN OF THRACE.

(Gerhard, *Trinksch. u. Gefässe*, pl. J.)

depth of sentiment and philosophical comprehension which pervades the religious faith of the Mysteries.

<sup>1</sup> Women behind the seat of Orpheus are enchanted with his music, so is the deer on the ground at his side. Thracian youths try to induce him to join in their

Barring the Eleusinian festivals, the Orphic rites were the most prominent of the several Mysteries. Orpheus, the inventor of the lyre, was a famous poet and singer, who could soothe the wild



RAVING MÆNADS.

Relief in colored clay, after Skopas. (Campana, *op. plast.*, plate 47.  
Baumeister, *Denkmäler des kl. Alterthums*, plate XVIII., p. 848.)

beasts of the wilderness and make the stones move to music. When his wife, Eurydice, died, he went down to Hades and through the

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games; but he is lost in his art and thinks only of Eurydice. Ovid's *Metam.*, X., 73 ff.; Virgil's *Georg.*, IV., 515.

power of his song obtained her release, on the condition that in returning he would not look back. The legend tells us that Orpheus could not restrain himself, and disobeying the command of Hades, turned round to embrace the shadow of his wife who was following him. As he glanced at her, she disappeared from his sight forever. Having returned to Thrace, his native country, Orpheus is said to have been torn to pieces by the women there, who were jealous of his incurable love for his wife.

Such is the myth as we know it from tradition, which by no means excludes the fact that the legend of the Orphic Mysteries was quite different. That Orpheus was slain is established by vase-pictures, but it seems doubtful to say that he did not succeed in releasing Eurydice from the domain of death; for the monuments



Faun and Bacchante

Thyrsus-bearer

Bacchante and Faun

## FREScoes OF HERCULANEUM.

(From Taylor, p. 206.)

depicting the legend always represent the happy restoration of the poet's lost wife, and there is no indication of a renewed separation, which, if it were an essential part of the myth, would certainly have been intimated in some way by the artist.

The myth reflects vestiges of a most ancient religious rite, which finds a parallel in the annual slaughter of incarnated gods, which was still celebrated by the Mexicans in the shape of human sacrifices at the time of the discovery of America.

The Orpheus myth is closely related to the Dionysian or Bacchic orgies which were celebrated by the women of ancient Greece in remote mountain wildernesses. With loose garments and hair disheveled, swinging the thyrsus and beating the cymbal, they

danced by the light of torches and tore a living bull to pieces with their teeth. The bull represented the god Dionysos Zagreus, and his bellowing marked the suffering of the dying god. The eating of the raw flesh of the slain deity was an essential part of the ceremony and constituted the climax of the holy rite. But though the god must die, he remains immortal and reappears as a new-born child. On Mount Parnassus the women carried back a baby, representing Dionysos Liknites, the god-child, in a winnowing-fan.



INITIATION INTO THE BACCHIC MYSTERIES.<sup>1</sup>

(Antique relief in clay after Campana, *opere in plast.*, .45.)

The winnowing-fan (λίκνον, or λικμός, or πτύον), is a shallow basket, commonly made of plaited straw or wicker. It was also used for measuring corn<sup>2</sup> for horses and cattle, and thus bears some likeness to the manger of the Christian nativity legends.

<sup>1</sup> A priestess leads the applicant whose head is veiled, and a man dressed as a satyr exhibits a basket full of fruit and the symbol of reproduction.

<sup>2</sup> The πτύον, as we know from Hesychius, was used on the island of Cyprus as a corn measure, hence δίπτυον or double measure, being one half a μέδμνος.

Greek poets use the word *λίκνον* directly for cradle,<sup>1</sup> and Christian artists sometimes represent the infant Jesus as lying in a basket that resembles the winnowing-fan. The bearer of the winnowing-fan in the Bacchic procession was called *liknophoros*.<sup>2</sup> That John the Baptist described Christ as holding in his hands a winnowing-



SYMBOLS AND IMPLEMENTS OF DIONYSIAN MYSTERIES.<sup>3</sup>

Antique onyx vessel, now in Paris.

fan (*πρῦον*) is an interesting coincidence, but presumably purely accidental.

Dionysos is the son of Semele and Zeus, but before his birth Semele requested her lover, whose truthfulness she had been led

<sup>1</sup> H. Hom. Merc. 21, 150. al. Call. Jov. 48, Arat. etc.

<sup>2</sup> Dem. 313, 28. Call. Cer. 126.

<sup>3</sup> An abacus (or sacred table) stands (after Clarac, *Musée*, pl. 125 and 127) in a grave under a canopy, not unlike the baldachin in Roman Catholic churches that

to doubt through the insinuations of the jealous Hera, to show himself to her in his real divinity. Zeus warned her, but she insisted, and as he had promised to fulfil her wish with an oath by Styx, he appeared with thunder and lightning, causing the instantaneous death of Semele. Zeus, however, saved the child and transferred it to his thigh, where it was matured soon to be born a second time. The baby Dionysos was then handed over through Hermes to the Nymphs of Nysa who cared for him until he grew to manhood.

Dionysos is a god of catholic tendencies. He enters into alliances wherever his worship is introduced. His friendship with Apollo is the subject of artistic representation, and though his relation to Demeter is not well defined, his orgies were combined with the Mysteries of Eleusis, an event of great importance in the religious development of Athens.

The mathematician Theon of Smyrna (I., 18) enumerates five stages of the Dionysian mystic rites: (1) Purification (*κάθαρσις*), which is done by baptism in the sea; (2) Instruction concerning the significance of the Mysteries (*τῆς τελετῆς παράδοσις*); (3) The scene of beholding (*ἐποπτεία*); (4) Completion of the scene of beholding by actual initiation, endowment with the ribbon and imposition of the wreath (*τέλος τῆς ἐποπτείας, ἀνάδεσις καὶ στεμμάτων ἐπίθεσις*); and, resulting from the ceremony, (5) A condition of bliss (*εὐδαιμονία*).

Dionysos is a god of comparatively recent date. He is not a member of Homer's Olympian dynasty. He is mentioned twice in the *Odyssey* (λ 325, ω 74) and once in the *Iliad* (Ξ 325), in passages which may be regarded as later additions. He is an alien in the aristocracy of the Greek gods, and appears first among the peasantry of Thracian extraction in Bœotia. Hesiod (*Th.*, 940) calls him and his mother gods of recent divinity.<sup>1</sup>

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is suspended over the altar. Cymbals, musical instruments, and also masks are hanging in the trees; the latter ones are perhaps reminiscences of prehistoric human sacrifices. On the table are the cist, drinking cups, and other sacred vessels as well as a figure of the god pouring out a libation.

<sup>1</sup> *νῦν δ' ἀμφότεροι θεοί εἰσιν*, i. e., but now they are both gods.



Dionysos was first worshipped among the farmers and was a god of the democracy. According to Plutarch his worship among

THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN APOLLO AND BACCHUS.  
The two gods surrounded by satyrs and menads meet under a palm tree.



the country folks was a rural merry-making. Plutarch says (*Cupid. divit.*, p. 527 c):

"The aboriginal feast of the Dionysia was celebrated formerly in a rural and jolly fashion. After an Amphora of wine and evergreen, there is one leading a

goat, then another with a basket of figs, and lastly a phallus. But now all this has disappeared. Golden vessels and precious garments are carried about; people drive in carriages and use masks."

With the rise of democracy the religious cult of Dionysos grew in significance.<sup>1</sup> Hence the connexion which according to tradition obtained between Theseus and Bacchus. Epimenides introduced Cretan conceptions into the Dionysian Mysteries, and Peisistratos, the tyrant who built his rule upon his popularity with the common people, added much pomp and art to the public festivals of the



INITIATION SCENE OF THE BACCHIC MYSTERIES.<sup>2</sup>  
(*Mus. Borb.*, V., 23.)

popular god. From this time on the cult of Dionysos took an ever-increasing hold on the minds of the Greek people. He became more and more idealised and was henceforth celebrated as saviour

<sup>1</sup> O. Ribbeck, *Anfänge und Entwicklung des Dionysos Kultus in Attika*, Kiel, 1869.

<sup>2</sup> The applicant is seated on a throne covered with the fleece of a ram. His head is veiled; a priestess behind him lowers two torches; the priest, dressed in Bacchic fashion with long hair arranged in womanish style, carries the basket with the Bacchic symbols and pours oil into the fire on the altar.

and liberator. He continued to retain his original jollity and boisterous buoyancy. In the fields he was represented by a mere trunk dressed in a long garment and covered with a mask, but being the suffering god, the twice-born, slain by Titans, and resurrected as a child, he acquired a tragic meaning and a profound philosophical significance, which finds expression in many excellent Dionysos statues still extant. The face of the god shows a divine enthusiasm, combined with insatiable longing. He is filled with a definite joy of his destiny, but at the same time with an indefinite yearning for higher and better pleasures. It is the happiness of a divine intoxication and the restlessness of a lover's longing for his leman far away.

It was under the influence of the Dionysos cult that the Greek



BACCHIC LIFE.

tragedy developed from crude vintage jests to the grand *dénouement* of the Athenian trilogies of Æschylos, Sophocles, and Euripides.

The silence that was preserved as to the ceremonies and sacred symbols, constituted a halo which added considerably to the awe that surrounded the Mysteries, but it has served at the same time to obscure our sources of information, which are consequently very meager. There is a good deal of Orphic literature left, hymns and rhapsodies, legends and holy sayings (*ἱεροὶ λόγοι*), sentences and poems, but they offer distorted reflexions of the true meaning of the Orphic faith, and contain many extravagant notions, such as belief in the magic power of stones and herbs, which are foreign to the Mysteries themselves. Prof. Karl Seidenadel in the preface to

his German translations of Orphic poetry characterises them in these words:

"When the Homeric world of gods had lost its hold upon the people who had awakened to active political life and to thought, the symbolic rites of mysteries sprang up. And when afterwards the practice of the heathen religion and especially of the oracles had vanished, a new kind of Orphic mystery and prophecy formed itself amidst the Neoplatonism, as a last attempt to prolong the life of vanished heathendom: the theurgy, the theurgic 'teletai.' They taught how to conjure the gods, to appear and to reveal the future by bloodless sacrifices and prayers, lustration, and magic rites, especially by the application of herbs (e. g., Orpheus Argon, 953-985) and also of stones (Orph. Lithica, 360-381, 693-741). The literature produced in the service or in the spirit of this theurgy contains the 88 Orph. hymns, a collection of prayers (to the gods on high and beneath and to the natural powers), the 'Argonautica' and the 'Lithica.'

"In the old science of medicine we find in many instances the strongest superstition concerning plants, amulets, and stones as remedies for diseases (cf. Pliny, *Nat. History*, Book 36 and 37) and as such remedies, evidently taken from medical works, the stones appear in our poem (i. e., the 'Lithica'); new, however, is their specific application for the theurgical aims of the poem.

"The poem, with its fantastic, extravagant fiction, possesses neither a deep symbolic aim,<sup>1</sup> nor can it arouse any scientific interest. Its value is rather one for the history of the development of civilisation: the 'Lithica' prove perhaps better than any other literary product of those days how heathendom had become weakened and was on the verge of dissolution."

The most valuable and complete collection of the materials on the subject has been made by Lobeck in his learned book *Aglaophamus sive de Theologiae Mysticae Graecorum Causis libri tres*. The first book treats of the Eleusinian Mysteries, the second of Orphica, and the third of fragments which are uncertain. The book would probably have been more useful and found more readers if the author had dared to write it in his native tongue or in any other modern language.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We remember, for instance, the clever use of the Opal in the tale of the Ring in Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*.

<sup>2</sup> The main point of Lobeck's work consists in the refutation of an antiquated theory which assumes that the Mysteries were based upon a primitive revelation of God to mankind. While his contention is right, he was mistaken in several minor points, but his work remains up to date the most complete collection of all the classical passages which have reference to the Mysteries. More, and indeed im-

The Eleusinian Mysteries were originally the harvest festival of Demeter; but in this institution, developed in the course of time, new ideas were assimilated and the philosophies of foreign faiths appropriated. Orphic as well as Bacchic rites were adopted by the priests, and the main deities of the Eleusinian legend were identified, through the influence of Orphic priests, perhaps through the Orphic poet Onomacritos (a contemporary of Peisistratos and his son Hippias), with the gods of the Orphic cult. This could easily be done, partly on account of the similarity of the myths, which perhaps sprang from the same root, and partly for the reason that the Eleusinian Mysteries taught the mystic unity of all



KORA'S RETURN TO THE UPPER WORLD. (See p. 96.)

(Vase-picture of Bologna, *Museo Italiano* 2, pl. I., fig. 1. Roscher, *Lexicon der gr. und röm. Mythologie*, II., p. 1378.)

The first figure to the left is a satyr carrying a chest; the second figure is Kora, the third Hermes Psychopompos, the fourth Hecate.

gods. The child Iacchos, whose death and resurrection were represented at Eleusis, became now either Zagreus, the son of Zeus and Persephone of the Orphic cult, slain by the Titans and resuscitated by Dionysos,<sup>1</sup> or Dionysos himself as the childgod, the baby at the breast of his mother,—*Διόνυσος ἐπὶ τῇ μαστῇ*.

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portant, material has been discovered since Lobeck's time in ancient monuments and inscriptions.

<sup>1</sup> Call. Fr., 171. Nonn. D., 10, 294.

The general tendency of Orphic poetry was cosmopolitan and even monotheistic. All the gods were conceived as manifestations of Zeus, the One and All. Cleanthes in his hymn addresses Zeus in these words :<sup>1</sup>

"Greatest of the gods, god with many names,  
 God ever-ruling, and ruling all things !  
 Zeus, origin of Nature, governing the universe by law,  
 All hail ! For it is right for mortals to address thee ;  
 For we are thy offspring,<sup>2</sup> and we alone of all  
 That live and creep on earth have the power of imitative speech.  
 Therefore will I praise thee, and hymn forever thy power.

"Thee the wide heaven, which surrounds the earth, obeys :  
 Following where thou wilt, willingly obeying thy law.  
 Thou holdest at thy service, in thy mighty hands,  
 The two-edged, flaming, immortal thunderbolt,  
 Before whose flash all nature trembles.

"Thou rulest in the common reason, which goes through all,  
 And appears mingled in all things, great or small,  
 Which filling all nature, is king of all existences.  
 Nor without thee, Oh Deity,<sup>3</sup> does anything happen in the world,  
 From the divine ethereal pole to the great ocean,  
 Except only the evil preferred by the senseless wicked.  
 But thou also art able to bring to order that which is chaotic,  
 Giving form to what is formless, and making the discordant friendly ;  
 So reducing all variety to unity, and even making good out of evil.

"Thus throughout nature is one great law  
 Which only the wicked seek to disobey,  
 Poor fools ! who long for happiness,  
 But will not see nor hear the divine commands.  
 [In frenzy blind they stray away from good,  
 By thirst of glory tempted, or sordid avarice,  
 Or pleasures sensual and joys that fall.]  
 But do thou, Oh Zeus, all-bestower, cloud-compeller !  
 Ruler of thunder ! guard men from sad error.

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<sup>1</sup> After Rev. J. Freeman Clarke's translation, quoted from Thomas Taylor's *Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, pp. 239-240.

<sup>2</sup> St. Paul's quotation of this idea will be remembered in this connexion.

<sup>3</sup> Greek, *Δαίμων*, *Demon*, i. e., spiritual presence.

"Father! dispel the clouds of the soul, and let us follow  
 The laws of thy great and just reign!  
 That we may be honored, let us honor thee again,  
 Chanting thy great deeds, as is proper for mortals,  
 For nothing can be better for gods or men  
 Than to adore with hymns the Universal Law."

The same spirit breathes through the lines of other Orphic hymns, of which the following deserves quoting:<sup>1</sup>

"I shall utter to whom it is lawful; but let the doors be closed,  
 Nevertheless, against all the profane. But do thou hear,  
 Oh Musæus, for I will declare what is true. . . .

"He is the One, self-proceeding; and from him all things proceed,  
 And in them he himself exerts his activity; no mortal  
 Beholds Him, but he beholds all.

"There is one royal body in which all things are enwombed,  
 Fire and Water, Earth, Æther, Night and Day,  
 And Counsel [*Metis*], the first producer, and delightful Love,—  
 For all these are contained in the great body of Zeus.

"Zeus, the mighty thunderer, is first; Zeus is last;  
 Zeus is the head, Zeus the middle of all things;  
 From Zeus were all things produced. He is male, he is female;  
 Zeus is the depth of the earth, the height of the starry heavens;

"He is the breath of all things, the force of untamed fire;  
 The bottom of the sea; Sun, Moon, and Stars;  
 Origin of all; King of all;  
 One Power, one God, one Great Ruler."

There are a number of incidents reported about the Mysteries which deserve special notice.

At the marriage of Persephone the initiated sing:

"Out of the tympanon I have eaten,  
 Out of the cymbal I have drunk;  
 The sacred dish (*κέρνος*) I have carried,  
 And the bridal chamber (*παστόν*) I have entered."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Loc cit.*, pp. 238-239.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Clement Alex. *Exh.* II. and Psellus, the latter quoted by Thomas Taylor in his book on the *Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, p. 230.

Having partaken of the ceremony and having seen the symbols of the mystery, the initiated declare :

"I have fasted ; I have drunk the mixed drink (κυκελόν);

"I have taken from the chest (κίστη) and after handling deposited in the basket (κάλαθος) and from the basket into the chest."<sup>1</sup>

That these symbols in the chest were made of gold is stated by the poet Callimachus in his hymn to Ceres. Mr. Alexander Wilder, the editor of Thomas Taylor's *Bacchic Mysteries*, states in a footnote on p. 179 that a golden serpent, an egg, and a phallus were the contents of the chest.

Apuleius, the author of the story of Eros and Psyche, describes his initiation into the Mysteries in these words :

"I approached the confines of death, and having trodden on the threshold of Proserpina, I returned, having been carried through all the elements."



COINS WITH THE MYSTIC CIST AND SERPENTS EMERGING FROM IT.  
(*Abhandl. der Berl. Akad.*, 1855, pl. I., 1.)

He makes Psyche pass through the same ordeal and tells us that she addressed the following prayer to Demeter :

"I beseech thee, by thy fruit-bearing right hand, by the joyful ceremonies of harvest, by the occult sacred rites of thy cistæ, and by the winged car of thy attending dragons, and the furrows of the Sicilian soil, and the rapacious chariot (or car of the ravisher), and the dark descending ceremonies attending the marriage of Proserpina, and the ascending rites which accompanied the lighted return of thy daughter, and by other arcana which Eleusis the Attic sanctuary conceals in profound silence, relieve the sorrows of thy wretched suppliant Psyche."

The Mysteries are intended to purify the soul, and those who remain unpurified work out their own condemnation like those who partake unworthily of the Lord's Supper. Says Plato (*Phædo*, 38):

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Clement of Alexandria in his *Exhortation to the Heathen*, II. Ante Nic. Lib., Cl. A., Vol. I., p. 32.



"Those who instituted the Mysteries for us appear to have intimated that whoever shall arrive in Hades unpurified and not initiated shall lie in mud; but he who arrives there purified and initiated shall dwell with the gods. For there are many bearers of the wand (thyrsus), but few who are inspired."

Prof. Louis Dyer mentions in a footnote on page 181, added to his interesting article on the gods of Eleusis, several important facts which will throw much light on the subject:

"The scholiast on line 158 of the *Frogs* of Aristophanes says: 'The opinion prevailed at Athens that whoever had been taught the Mysteries would, when he came to die, be deemed worthy of divine glory. Hence all were eager for initiation.' This would sometimes take place when a man was near his death. See Aristoph. *Peace*, v. 374 f., where *Trygaeus*, sure of approaching death, tries to borrow three drachmas to buy a bit of a porker (for an offering to the gods below), and says 'You know I've got to be initiated ere I die.'

"A curious ray of light is thrown upon the whole question of the Mysteries, and the comfort which they gave by assuring to the initiated especial privileges in the life beyond, by four Orphic fragments found in Southern Italy (three at Sybaris and one at Petelia). The date of the tombs wherein they were found on thin plates of gold is the third century B. C.; but Comparetti, in his account of them (*Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. iii. p. 112), says the Orphic fragments go back to the time of Euripides, and he refers to the well-known passage in Plato's *Republic* about the *Orpheotelestae* (ii. 364 B).

"Mr. Cecil Smith, 'Orphic Myths on Attic Vases' (*Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. xi. p. 346), gives the following summary of doctrine (derived from the three inscriptions in question) from later Orphic poems, and from a vase-painting of great and almost unique interest that goes back to a date earlier than 480 B. C.:

"In the cosmogony of the Orphic teaching there are two great cosmic elements—Zeus, the omnipotent all in all, and his daughter Kore, who combines in her personality the characteristic features of Persephone, Artemis, and Hekate; from the union of Zeus in serpent form with Kore, Zagreus is born, and to him, essentially in his character of *χθόνιος*, the kingdom is given of this world. Zagreus is the allegory of the life and death and resurrection of Nature. In the generally accepted version, he is brought up as the Zeus-child, and from fear of Hera, is sent on earth to be warded by the Kouretes. Hera sends the Titans, who surprise Zagreus at play, tear him in pieces, and eat him all except the heart. Zeus destroys the Titans with his thunderbolts, and out of their ashes the human race is born. Since the Titans have swallowed Zagreus, a spark of the divine element forever permeates the human system. The heart is carried by Athene to Zeus, who either gives it to Semele in a potion or swallows it himself, and thus is born another Zagreus, the 'younger Dionysus,' *ὁ νέος Διόνυσος*.' For the initiated death is a piece of good luck, and on one of the Sybaris tablets the departed soul exults, saying to the gods: *καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼν ὑμῶν*

γένος δλβον εὔχομαι εἶναι. Having atoned for the sin of the Titans by mystic ceremonies, the initiated claim the heritage of Zagreus, which is life everlasting. He is in their members, and through his death their immortality has been won."

Considering the fact that the Mysteries are an embodiment of hoary traditions, it is but natural that the symbols of resuscitation were phallic. What struck primitive man most, was the miracle of reproduction, and he regarded with special awe and wonder the sexual organs which could perform the mystery of creation. Hence phallic symbolism enters into every religion at a certain phase of its development, and is only removed when licentiousness renders it offensive to pure minds.

It is not impossible that the original significance of the symbols displayed at the Mysteries was no longer understood in Eleusis. We are told, for instance, that Demeter was in utter despair about the death of her daughter and would not be comforted, refusing to take the drink offered her for refreshment. Then Baubo,<sup>1</sup> her hostess, who took pity on her, having tried all possible means to console her guest, at last denuded herself and thereby caused the goddess to laugh. Now at last Demeter could be prevailed upon to take the refreshing drink, which gave her new strength to bear up in her tribulations and recover her lost child. Must we not assume that the exposure was more than a mere joke designed to make Demeter laugh,—a joke which would have been coarse even among savages; and must we not recognise in the act a comforting revelation, which assures the bereaved mother of the preservation and restoration of life, which is foreshadowed, as it were, in sexual reproduction and should be taken as a promise of the immortality of the soul? We have not the slightest doubt that such was the original meaning of the myth and perhaps also of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

In the primitive stage of civilisation the sexual organs represented the idea of immortality, reincarnation, restoration to life, retribution in the future, etc., etc., among all the nations of the

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<sup>1</sup>According to the Homeric hymn *Iambe* the maid-servant of Metaneira.

world, the Israelites not excepted; and this is the significance of the Hebrew custom, that a person giving an oath binding beyond the grave, should place his hand under the thigh יָדוֹ תַּחַת יְרֵכְהוּ of the other person to whom the promise was made.<sup>1</sup> The same word יָרֵךְ is used to denote in a man the organ whence his offspring proceeds.<sup>2</sup>

Primitive man looked upon the wonders of generation with awe, and the sexual organs were to him both miraculous and sacred. They implied the secrets of fatherhood and motherhood and were far removed from thoughts of licentiousness. The original significance of phallic symbols must be regarded in the light of the interpretation of customs of their age and not from the standpoint of a more advanced civilisation; otherwise we shall misunderstand their meaning, as is done by Clement of Alexandria, who, forgetful of the many reminiscences of phallic customs in the Old Testament, sees nothing but obscenity in the mysteries of the pagans. He says in his *Exhortation to the Heathens*, chapt. II.:<sup>3</sup>

"What are these mystic chests?—for I must expose their sacred things, and divulge things not fit for speech. Are they not sesame cakes, and pyramidal cakes, and globular and flat cakes, embossed all over, and lumps of salt and a serpent the symbol of Dionysus Bassareus? And besides these, are there not pomegranates, and branches, and rods, and ivy leaves? and besides, round cakes and poppy seeds? And further, there are the unmentionable symbols of Themis, marjoram, a lamp, a sword, a woman's comb, which is a euphemism and mystic expression for a woman's secret parts."

Ceremonies which imply the use of phallic symbols always suggest the idea of an allusion to the renewal of life or immortality, and this was most probably the sense which it served in the Mysteries of Eleusis.

Our reports are incomplete and may be perverted, but we may expect that some phallic notions survived in the Mysteries; when we read, for instance, that Zeus expiated his transgression against Demeter for having become the father of Persephone by offering

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxiv. 2, 9; xlvii. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xlv. 26. Exod. i. 5. Judges viii. 30.

<sup>3</sup> The whole chapter is worth careful perusal.

her the testicles of a goat in place of his own manhood.<sup>1</sup> The original meaning is apparently lost, and we only learn that phallic symbols were in some way used in the ritual.

Primitive man embodied in rites his philosophy of the creative power of nature's god and the fertilisation of the earth. In ancient times the letter of the myth dominated the spirit of its significance. The myth was enacted in connexion with the bloody ceremonies of human sacrifices, sometimes combined with cannibalism; then the cruelty of the rite was softened; a goat was substituted for a man; finally it was abandoned and enacted merely in allegorical rituals which were moralised about by reformers and philosophers.

But even the philosophical conception of ancient symbols cannot insure their continuance, when with the change of conditions the general world-conception changes. They become antiquated beyond redemption, and no interpretation, be it ever so ingenious and philosophical, will save them. Thus it became necessary that a new religion should replace them. But when Christianity came and swept the offensive symbols out of sight, the underlying ideas of death and resurrection survived and reappeared in a nobler form. Such is the natural course of evolution, as might be expected.

So long as Christianity still had to struggle for existence, the early Christians recognised the kinship of their own religion with the underlying dualism of the Greek Mysteries; they even allowed their own views to be influenced by Orphic traditions; but when Christianity had become firmly established, it naturally repudiated its former ally, denouncing it as paganism, and in later centuries the figure of Christ as Orpheus disappeared from the symbolism of Christian art.

The Church Father, Clement of Alexandria, who wrote at a time when "the oracles had gone to decay" and "the springs of divination were dead and stripped of their glory," curses the inventors of the Mysteries, saying: "Perish, then the man who was the

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<sup>1</sup> The report of Psellus (quoted in full by Taylor, *loc. cit.*, p. 231) mentions the same object among the symbols of the mysteries, speaking also of the throes of Demeter, the drinking of bile, and her heartaches.

author of their imposture among men" . . . and predicts for them and their followers "a fate they hope not for, that awaits them after death." (*Ante-Nicene Chr. Libr.*, Vol. IV. *Cl. Al.*, Vol. I., p. 32.)

Clement of Alexandria condemns the pagans for "having invented saviours in the persons of the Dioscuri, Heracles the averter of evil, and Asklepios the healer." He enumerates a number of mysteries which treat of the death and resurrection of a god, telling us, for instance, that "the Corybantes, having killed their third brother, covered the head of the dead body with a purple cloth, crowned it, and carrying it on the point of a spear, buried it under the base of Olympus."<sup>1</sup> He adds with indignation, "These Mysteries are in short murders and funerals!" without becoming conscious of the similarity which they bear to the story of the Messiah clad in purple and crowned with thorns, who drank bile, was slain, was buried, and resurrected.

Christ like Dionysos is born in a cave,<sup>2</sup> he is tortured, slain, and resurrected. He compares himself to the vine. The wine is his sacred symbol, and by drinking it his followers partake of his spirit. Further, Dionysos comes in a triumphal procession seated on an ass. With shouts of joy he is saluted as king, as liberator, and saviour. How similar is the story of Christ's entry into Jerusalem! The bull and the ass are sacred to Dionysos, and we find the same animals pictured on the oldest nativity illustrations of Christ. Other analogies will be found in the drinking of gall and the mixed drink which Christ refuses to take, before descending into the infernal regions. Then there is the ceremony of baptism, the use of holy bread or sacrificial cakes, etc., and above all the idea of the divine sonship and the proclamation of the coming of a kingdom of the soul, which at present can be realised by mortals in visions only, in dreams and ecstasies.

<sup>1</sup> *Ante-Nicene Chr. L. Cl. of A.*, I., p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> The canonical Gospels speak of a stable, while the apocrypha and the local tradition of Bethlehem insist on the place of Christ's nativity being a cave. We need not add that Mithras and other saviours, too, were born in caves, or, like Krishna, in concealment.

The appearance of Christianity was prepared for in many ways. The religious fermentation which was caused through the fusion of the nations from the time of the conquest of Asia by Alexander the Great, propounded the problems of Gnosticism, regarding the spirituality of the soul, its immortality, the oneness of God, etc., all of which are pre-Christian. Plato set up the ideal of the perfectly just man who would rather be than seem good, even though he was tortured, blinded, suffered the utmost disgrace and was crucified. This sounds like a prophecy, and in a certain sense it is a prophecy; it is a foretelling; but it is more than a prophecy; it is a fore-determining. Plato prepared the way for Christianity by setting before the world the ideal of the Crucified, the sufferer for righteousness's sake; and in the same sense the Greek Mysteries are prophecies as well as preparations. They proposed problems and offered a solution in ritual performances. Christianity is a fulfilment, a *pleroma*, of the yearnings that prompted the problems, a fulfilment which was satisfactory to the Greek people after the breaking down of their national religion.

EDITOR.